



City of New Bedford  
Scott W. Lang, Mayor

City of New Bedford  
Office of the Mayor  
Contact: Elizabeth Treadup  
(508) 979-1410  
[Elizabeth.Treadup@ci.new-bedford.ma.us](mailto:Elizabeth.Treadup@ci.new-bedford.ma.us)

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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

### **Public Health Officials Alert Community of Dangers Associated With Secondhand Smoke**

**New Bedford, Massachusetts-** The Massachusetts' statewide Smoke-free Workplace Law, implemented in 2004, has eliminated secondhand smoke from bars, restaurants, and workplaces, but as schools reopen for the year, health officials remind the public to be wary of the potential for secondhand smoke on school grounds. The City of New Bedford fully supports the Massachusetts Tobacco Control Program's efforts to improve the air quality for every resident and in particular its recent campaign, "*Stop the Secondhand Smoke in Our Schools*," to raise awareness of the danger of secondhand smoke on school grounds.

City of New Bedford Health Director, Marianne De Souza said exposure to secondhand smoke even in small amounts is unhealthy, "According to a recent Surgeon General's report, there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Every second our children are exposed to secondhand smoke, their health is in danger."

Far from just an annoyance, secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard. In the short term, even brief exposure to secondhand smoke can trigger asthma attacks, ear infections, and respiratory infections in children. Secondhand smoke contains 250 chemicals known to be toxic or carcinogenic, so the long-term effects of exposure are also serious.

To raise awareness of this important health hazard, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has distributed flyers, decals and newspaper ads around the state and this city to remind parents, teachers and school administrators to "*Stop the Secondhand Smoke in Our Schools*. Over the last year, Director De Souza has collaborated with the New Bedford, Dartmouth, and Fairhaven Public Schools to promote the smoke-free schools initiative.

The same workplace law that made bars and restaurants smoke-free across Massachusetts covers all schools, public and private. In addition, tobacco use on all public school

grounds, including athletic fields, and school buses is prohibited. To report a violation, anyone can call the state's anonymous hotline at (800) 922-1895.

**Sidebar box: Student smoking and schools**

- 90% of adult smokers began smoking while they were teenagers.
- One in five Massachusetts high school students (20.7%) is a current cigarette smoker.
- The nicotine in tobacco is a powerful addictive drug, and once a person starts smoking, it becomes very difficult to quit.
- Research indicates that the earlier young people begin to smoke, the greater their permanent lung damage and the more likely they are to become addicted to cigarettes.

*Source: Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005 (most recent release)*  
(The survey report can be found at  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/hprograms/yrbs/05/ch2.pdf> )

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